

COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File Nos. MP165 and 6383



GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK

REVISED DESIGN CONCEPT

31st Street, west to 34th Street, NW
Washington, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

September 4, 2003

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of a revised design concept pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)).

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the revised design concept for Georgetown Waterfront Park, from 31st Street west to 34th Street, NW, as illustrated and described in the report titled: *Final Schematic Design, Georgetown Waterfront Park*, dated March 31, 2003.
- **Requires** that the National Park Service, in the preparation of preliminary site and building plans, explore and consider the following issues and present a review, determination, and design, in the submission of the preliminary park design for:
 - Better integration of the central water feature area with the stepped shoreline terminal focal point at the base of Wisconsin Avenue
 - Increased height of the vertical elements of the overlooks (and possible increased horizontal projection of the overlook deck) at their locations on the shoreline.
 - Introduction of floating boat dock for temporary docking at the concrete stepped shoreline area.

- Designation of a memorial site as indicated in the *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*, dated December 2001.

Deborah B. Young
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

E. Keller

NCPC File Nos. MP165/6383



GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK REVISED DESIGN CONCEPT, 31st Street, west to 34th Street, NW, Washington, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

August 28, 2003

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted a proposal to revise the previously approved concept plan for the Georgetown Waterfront Park (GWP), which was earlier approved by the Commission on May 2, 1985. The submitted plan retains the essential elements previously approved such as prominent pedestrian spaces, a shoreline promenade, bike/hike trail, overlooks, shoreline access and a transitional park environment from natural to urban. Additionally, the importance of street linkages and open space access to historic Georgetown have been maintained as significant aspects to the revised plan as originally identified by the Commission in its earlier review.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of a revised design concept pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1))

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

- **Approves** the revised design concept for GWP, from 31st Street west to 34th Street, NW, as illustrated and described in the report titled: *Final Schematic Design, Georgetown Waterfront Park*, dated March 31, 2003.
- **Requires** that the NPS, in the preparation of preliminary site and building plans, explore and consider the following issues and present a review, determination, and design, in the submission of the preliminary park design for:
 - Better integration of the central water feature area with the stepped shoreline terminal focal point at the base of Wisconsin Avenue
 - Increased height of the vertical elements of the overlooks (and possible increased horizontal projection of the overlook deck) at their locations on the shoreline.

- Introduction of a floating boat dock for temporary docking at the concrete stepped shoreline area.

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The NPS has submitted a revised design concept for Georgetown Waterfront Park (GWP). The park design encompasses the park boundaries between 31st Street to 34th Street, NW directly adjacent to the Potomac River. The design takes in an area that extends back from the shoreline approximately 200–235 feet to K Street, NW, and essentially under the Whitehurst elevated Expressway. The site is approximately 10 acres abutting the Potomac River and provides direct views to the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Roosevelt Island, Key Bridge and the Potomac Palisades. The Whitehurst Expressway, above K Street, defines the length of the northern edge of the site and creates a visual barrier between Georgetown and the planned park. However, narrow view corridors to the park and river along Georgetown streets oriented north/south under the elevated road provide important visual connections between city and park.



VICINITY LOCATION OF GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK



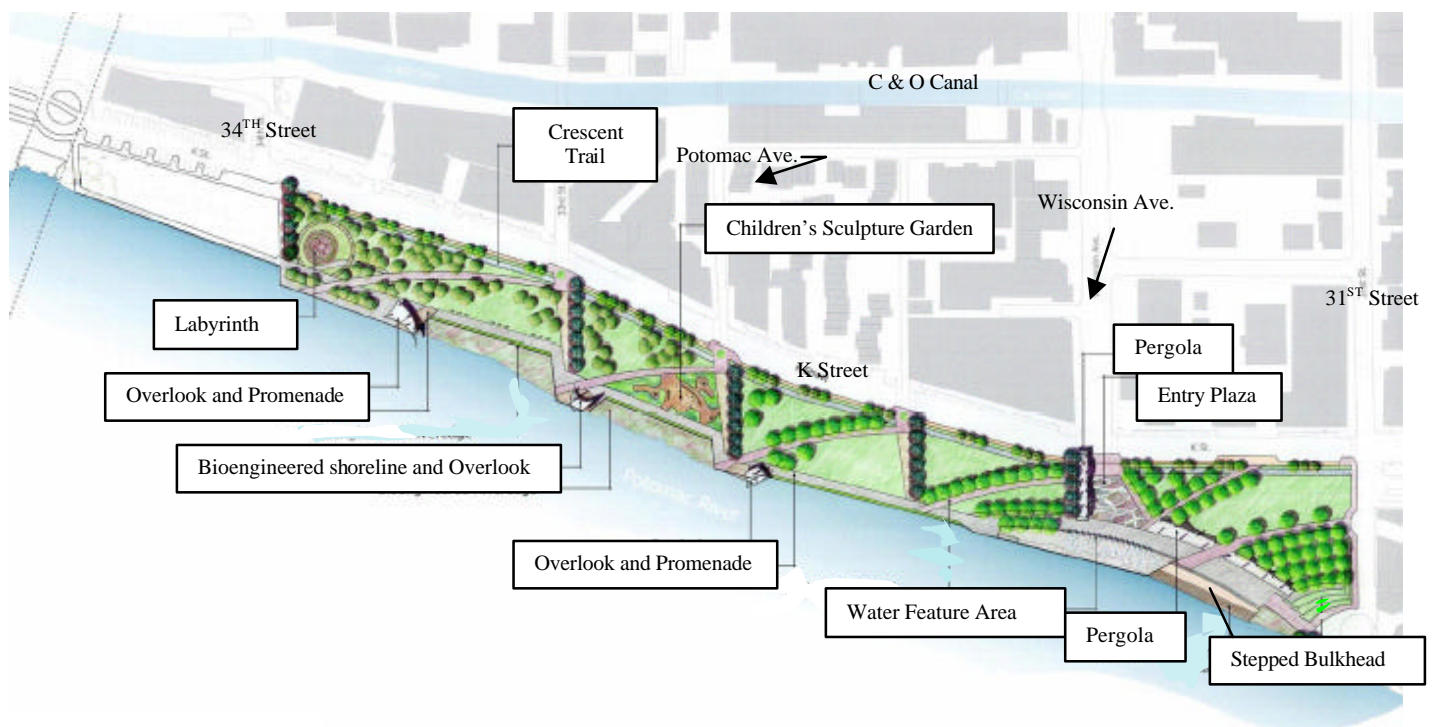
BOUNDARY OF REVISED CONCEPT PLAN

The revised concept plan includes a program of activities as follows:

- A promenade generally paralleling the river and abutting the river's edge.
- Opportunities for interpretive displays and interpretation.
- An area reserved for boathouses.
- A regional trail component.
- Open lawn areas for passive recreation.
- Shelters/pavilions for shade, sitting and viewing.
- A primary plaza space at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue as the major gathering space of the park.
- An interactive water feature with no standing water pool.
- A play area.
- A labyrinth.
- Opportunities to access the water.
- Intensity of activity decreasing from east to west.

Additionally, during the Park Service's efforts to arrive at a supportable plan to address the many competing uses of the river's edge, a public outreach process utilized by the design team and NPS sought to adhere to public stakeholder objectives that were identified and include:

- The park should not encourage major gatherings and should remain passive in character.
- Public art should be subtle and should, ideally, engage the Whitehurst Expressway.
- Stepped access to the river was thought to be highly desirable.
- The program of activities should encourage seasonal usage including a large amount of shade in summer.
- The park design must recognize that the site lies in a floodplain.



REVISED CONCEPT PLAN FOR GEORGETOWN WATERFRONT PARK

The submitted concept design includes the following main features that are illustrated on the overall concept design site plan and within the report. These include:

- A major plaza at the southern shoreline terminus of Wisconsin Avenue that will provide primary access to the park and provide flexibility for a variety of activities, which could occur in the park. The space is reinforced with two pergolas that provide shade and shelter to park users and engages the Wisconsin Avenue corridor north of the Whitehurst Expressway.
- An interactive water feature will be located at the river edge of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor at the plaza and will allow park users opportunities to engage in water activity

throughout the year with seasonal changes of water as flowing jets, misters and foggers. The water feature will not have a traditional pool with standing water. The feature's water will drain immediately through paving to a re-circulating water reservoir under the plaza.

- A stepped bulkhead will allow park users to access the river to the east of the interactive water feature. Its location, near the finish line of rowing competition during regattas, will enable several hundred people to sit and watch the events.
- To draw pedestrians along the river's edge, three strategically positioned river Overlooks are proposed along the shoreline starting at the vicinity of Potomac Street, NW. Adjacent to the proposed shoreline pedestrian promenade, the Overlooks offer park-users intimate river views at key points along the Potomac. Each overlook varies slightly in design and view orientation allowing park attendees to experience the wide range of shoreline vistas. Their design is virtually transparent to avoid blocking views of the river during the daytime. In darkness, they would emit a soft light providing a focal destination and illumination.
- A children's sculpture garden is proposed to be located at the approximate center of the park. The garden would feature forms recalling the maritime heritage of the park site and be inviting for children and adults alike.
- At the far western edge of the current phase of the concept design, a labyrinth will be located to provide a counterpoint to the other park activities as a place of contemplation and introspection. This area would be constructed primarily of stone paving but also would feature areas of planting intermixed in the design. The paving stone offers opportunities for inscribing icons and narrative inscriptions or contextual signage plaques that would convey historical and educational information about the park. Benches are to be provided along a pathway at the perimeter of the labyrinth.

An important aspect of the concept design also is to re-establish the bulkhead line and seawall of the shore, and make it more responsive to environmental concerns by integrating the shore to the river's constantly flowing force of water. To achieve this, NPS intends the park design to use as much of the existing bulkhead as possible. The plan, moreover, identifies two zones as potential areas to restore the shoreline using bioengineering techniques, a practice that is supported by the Park Service.



**SECTION OF PARK WITH BIOENGINEERED
EDGE AT RIVER**

Soil bioengineering is an integrated technology that uses sound engineering practices in conjunction with integrated ecological principles to design, construct, and maintain living vegetation systems to repair damage caused by erosion. Soil bioengineering is adaptive and resilient - working well with dynamic and fast moving water. A vegetated soil bioengineering system in the concept design plans offers a natural connection to the river. It is a green space and a natural living edge at the river that would provide several benefits:

- Natural in appearance with texture and form that will provide seasonal changes
- Offers a cooling effect to the air and modifies water temperatures
- Improves infiltration and water quality and reduces runoff of stormwater
- Improves water quality
- Enhances aquatic and riparian habitat diversity
- Serves as a wildlife area offering cover, allowing movement, nesting, and foraging for food
- Provides a positive effect on air quality through the use of trees and shrubs
- An earthen and vegetation system that absorbs noise
- Offers immediate erosion control to the cut slope face
- Low long-term maintenance costs

Other site engineering techniques involve addressing a stormwater management strategy and site development constraints imposed by existing utility functions and structures. On-site stormwater management would include use of pervious surfaces, increased planted infiltration areas and underground stormwater detention basins. Consideration is also being given to use of vortex-type catch basins to facilitate removal of contaminants from the stormwater before it is released back to the river. With the exception of the northeastern corner of the site, the project area generally slopes to the south. This overall pattern will be retained and enhanced through adjustment of grades to allow surface flow toward gently sloped, planted swales and small detention basins both filled with highly pervious material and planted at grade. These measures will be placed at the low points (south side) of lawn areas; at the river edge south of the railings; and in the planted areas between the bicycle trail and pedestrian walkway, south of K Street. Large lawn areas would absorb and/or filter much of the stormwater within the park itself. These areas also would withstand flooding and provide floodwater storage in instances when the river reaches high-water stages.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its May 2, 1985 meeting, the Commission approved the concept plan for GWP and its Phase 1 development. The Commission was favorably disposed with the initiative, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 71.10(70.00)-29610, except for the subsurface parking and moorage for the S.S. Williamsburg; and noted that in the development of further site development plans that views of the Potomac River from the foot of Wisconsin Avenue be strengthened by creating openings in any proposed tree masses and in the related landscape design.

On May 23, 1985, the Commission took responsibility for the scope and content of the Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Park Boundary, GWP produced by the National

Park Service, dated June 1984; and approved the transfer of jurisdiction over the area of the proposed park from the District of Columbia to the National Park Service for park use involving Squares 1174 and Squares 1176 through 1179.

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Applicant:	National Park Service
Architect:	Wallace, Roberts and Todd, LLC, landscape architects Jody Pinto Studios, landscape sculpture structures Parson, Brinckerhoff, Quade, and Douglas, site engineering With support of Robbin B. Sotir & Assoc., Delon Hampton & Assoc., Grenald Waldron Assoc. and Oehrlein Assoc.
Square Footage:	Not available at this time
Estimated Cost:	\$15 million on magnitude of work estimate that includes contingencies
Schedule:	Not available at this time

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on August 13, 2003 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Fire Department; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

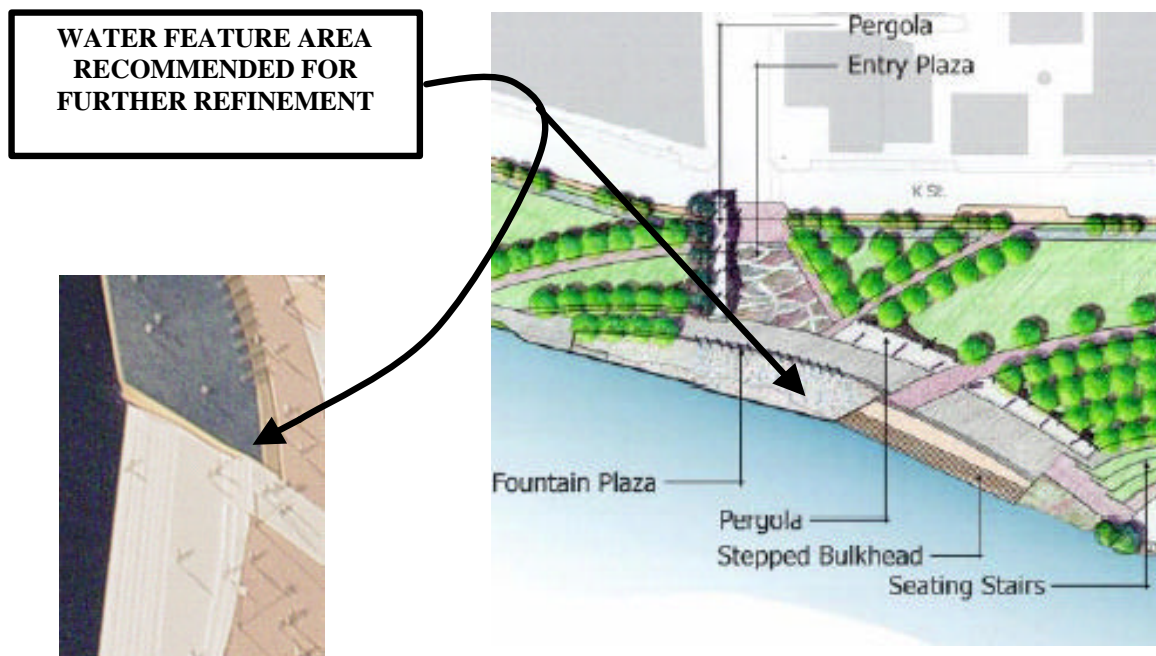
EVALUATION

Staff **recommends approval of the revised design concept** for the GWP as defined by the submitted report titled: *Final Schematic Design, Georgetown Waterfront Park* dated March 31, 2003. However, staff also is requesting the Commission require the National Park Service to explore and consider the following issues, and present a review and NPS determination in the submission of the GWP preliminary design that encompasses the matters below. These concerns include:

- Better integration of the central water feature area with the steeped shoreline terminal focal point at the base of Wisconsin Avenue.
- Increased height of the vertical elements of the overlooks (and possible increased horizontal projection of the overlook deck) at their locations at the shoreline.
- Introduction of a floating boat-docking pier for temporary docking at the concrete stepped shoreline.

The central interactive water area at the terminus to Wisconsin Avenue is appropriately programmed as a park element. Its abrupt edge, however, at the feature's junction with the

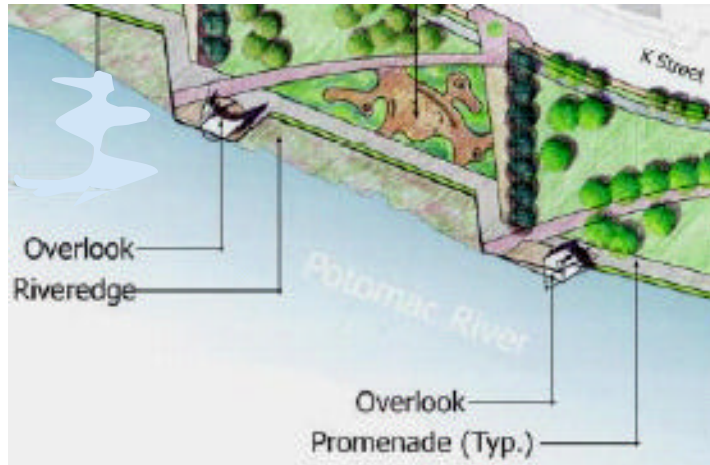
stepped bulkhead is visually disruptive and incongruous with the treatment of other park elements, which appear to move and transition into their adjacent areas much more successfully and seamlessly. Perhaps the element requires only refinement of its southern and eastern edges to allow some form of overlap or horizontal extension both out over the bulkhead and east over the steps. Such an approach would allow the development of a recess to obscure any necessary service or mechanical access entries to the lower areas of the interactive water area. Another approach would be to physically separate the two elements with some form of transitional area between the two. Whatever the method, the objective sought is essentially a better transition between the water feature and the open descending steps.



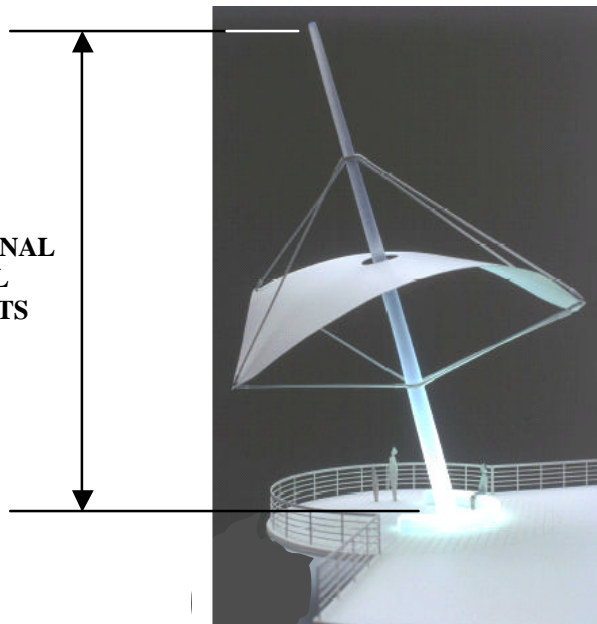
MODEL PHOTO OF WATER FEATURE AND PLAN DETAIL

The issue of the overlooks is one of only fine-tuning, as staff is very pleased with the successful placement and basic appearance of the overlook design. The overlook locations adjacent to the public promenade offer park users panoramas of the river and an opportunity to approach and extend out over the river. Their character evokes a maritime theme and each is centered around a tall, color-tinted, translucent “mast” which is internally illuminated at night. The base of each overlook provides seating, a wood-planked floor, railing, and all sheltered by a translucent shade element supported from the mast. In total composition the overlook design is very engaging. Staff believes, however, the scale of the vertical mast is somewhat short and maybe lost to the

background of the park and surrounding Georgetown area as the waterfront, in the future, is further developed. Staff believes an increase in height is appropriate for the mast elements.



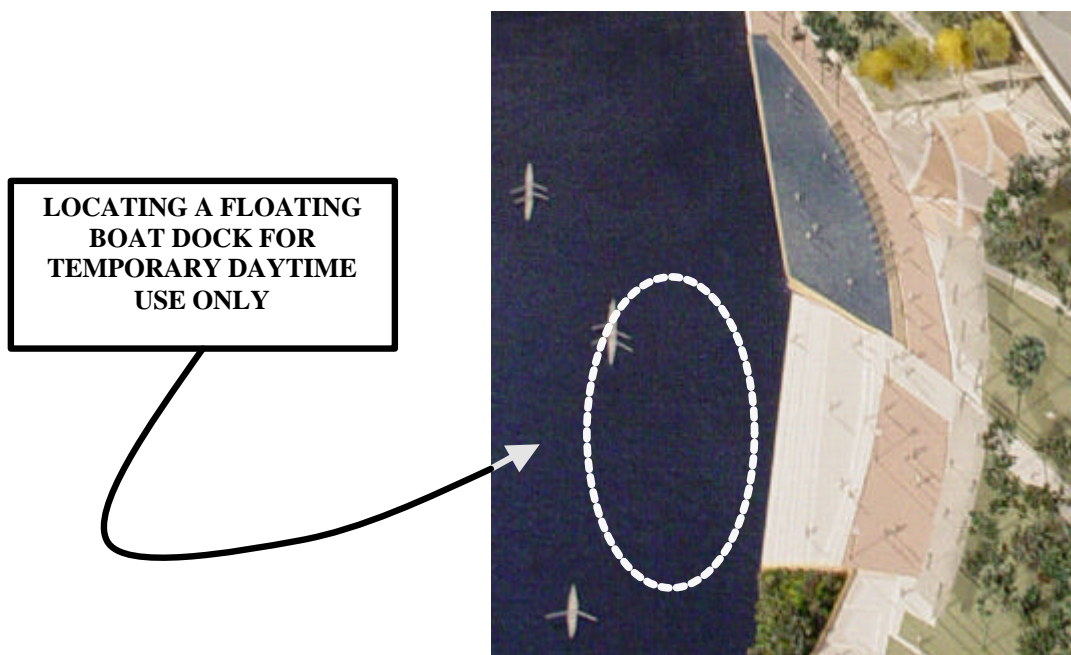
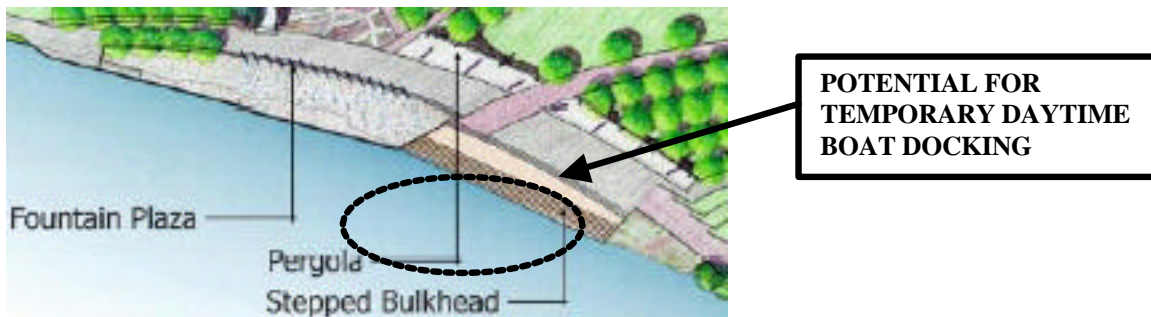
**REQUEST ADDITIONAL
HEIGHT TO ALL
OVERLOOK MASTS**



OVERLOOK PLAN DETAIL AND PHOTO OF MODEL OF TYPICAL OVERLOOK

Finally, staff recognizes the careful consideration achieved by the design team and NPS in the development of the stepped bulkhead concept and the issues of public interaction at the rivers edge. However, staff believes the unique opportunity to be at the water's edge includes the

adjacent proximity of many of the elements and activities that occur at or on the water, including boating and the attraction and interest boats generate from all ages of people. To provide the chance to move down to the water, but not to have boats of all types near-by to view and approach, leaves something missing from the waterside experience. Consequently, staff concludes it is appropriate to consider a limited-scale floating boat dock (for boat mooring only) at the stepped area that could be closed “after park hours”. The staff appreciates the logistic requirements such an activity evokes but careful design and planning can achieve this use in a public park setting, as is demonstrated by many lakeside and riverside parks found in metropolitan areas such as Pittsburgh, Saint Louis, Buffalo, and Alexandria, VA. Should there be obvious need to implement guidance to control powered craft, versus the need for non-motorized boat activity during certain periods of the year, the staff finds it appropriate that NPS would work with stakeholders to determine what types of control might be feasible.

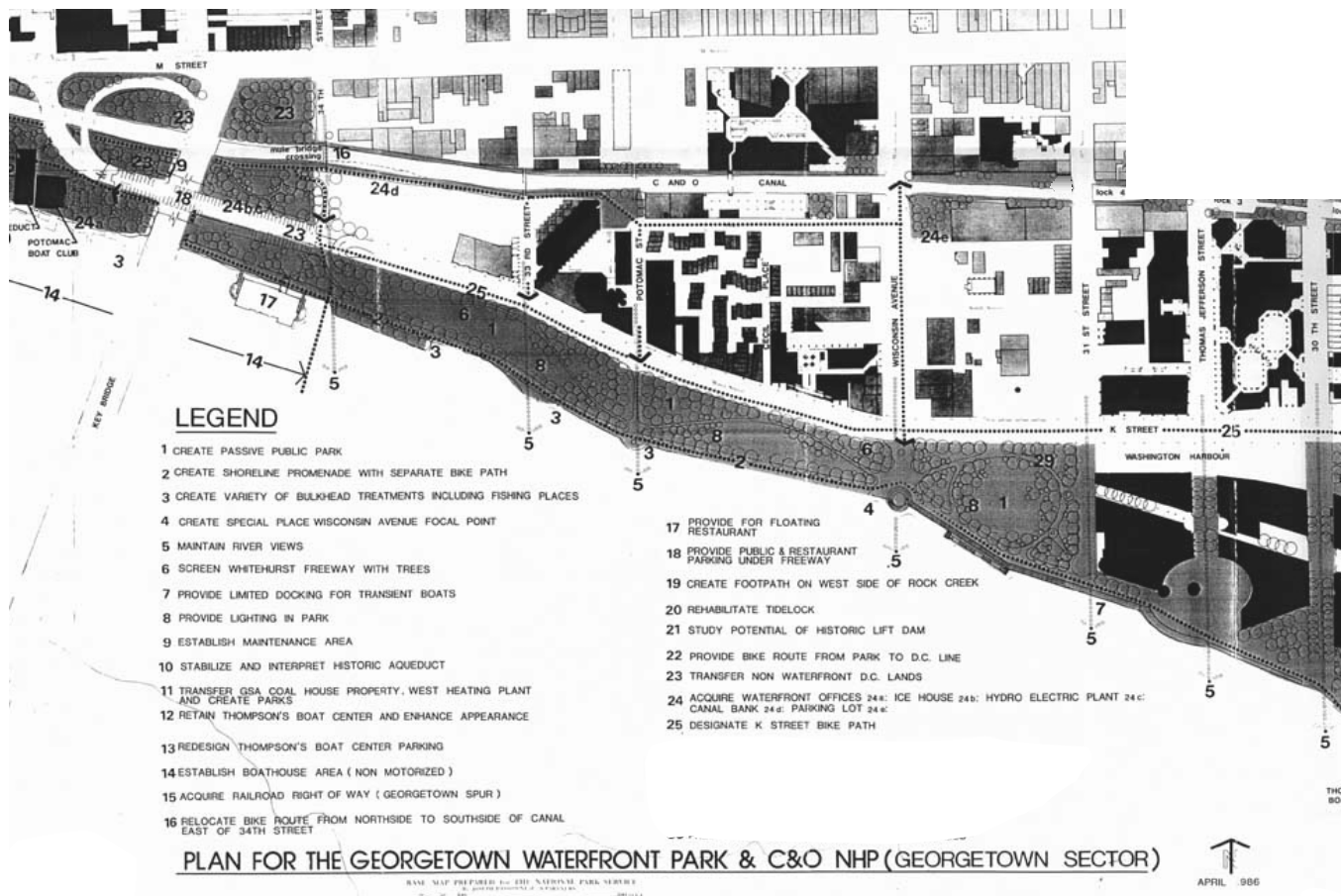


PLAN DETAIL OF STEPPED BULKHEAD AREA WITH PHOTO OF MODEL HIGHLIGHTING POTENTIAL DOCKING AREA

Staff in evaluating the submitted revised plan, did analyze all of the proposed changes in comparison to the previously submitted plan of May 1985. That plan included the following:

- A promenade and plaza
- Various walkways with benches and lighting
- Sculpture and fountain elements
- Small multi-use pavilions
- Large extents of landscaping similar to Constitution gardens and other floodplain parks

Much of the previous staff and Commission review focused on the fact the earlier concept addressed views across the narrowest portion of the Potomac at the bottom of Wisconsin Avenue. Additionally, there was the desire to maintain more openness of a central plaza at the Wisconsin terminus and that the treed walkways be more open and unrestricted in the views afforded to areas within the park as well as toward the river. All of these concerns are addressed in the newly submitted revised concept plan and provide the contrast, view arrangement, and openness sought by the 1985 Commission review. Improvements are also now provided by the full incorporation of the Crescent Trail alignment through the park on the south side of K Street, providing connectivity to the wider regional trail network, and the provision of additional overlook and focal areas at the immediate river shoreline. The earlier approved plan is illustrated below.



The 1985 Plan established that the park's character would be passive in nature and that objective is maintained in the current submittal. Features such as promenades, plazas, walkways, open lawn spaces, plantings, benches, and lighting were to constitute the development within the park and are still featured in the new revised plan. No surface parking was to be provided within the park as originally proposed. The current plan also offers no parking within the park area.

The original plan exhibited a shoreline promenade that was to be created for the entire length of the park between Rock Creek and Key Bridge. Bike and pedestrian usage was to be separated by landscape architectural treatments, such as paving patterns and street furniture. Surface treatment would vary depending upon the location within the park.

The illustrated plan featured an entire shoreline offering a variety of elements to achieve interest at the water's edge. Steps, esplanades, walls, docks, piers, and natural vegetated slopes were all to be employed. Much of the existing bulkhead at that time also was to be retained and improved through modification and surface treatment. The 1985 design also preserved and respected existing views from north/south streets toward the river. The plan emphasized the importance that such views be preserved so that the historic visual relationship of Georgetown to its waterfront was maintained. Shade trees were to be planted throughout the park to screen as much of the Whitehurst Expressway as possible. The use of trees and their careful placement to direct views is still fully maintained in the revised plan.

Limited public docking space was to be provided east of the Wisconsin Avenue axis. The idea at that time was to offer an opportunity for all types of boaters to visit the park by water. Only a limited number of craft were to have the opportunity to tie up, due to the potential for conflict with non-motorized boat traffic along this section of the waterfront.

The plan also noted that a National Park Service study indicated that there was considerable unmet demand for non-motorized boating facilities along the Georgetown Waterfront. The park boundaries at that time designated a general area of land and water where new boathouses would be appropriate. The area assigned to boathouses extended west of Key Bridge about 1,100 to 1,200 feet. To the east of Key Bridge, the waterfront area included the site of a proposed floating restaurant. Should the restaurant not be developed, the area was considered appropriate for boating facilities. In that area boating facilities could be provided either privately or through a National Park Service concession operation. The plan noted that floating boathouses, or boathouses on land, would be appropriate provided public boating facilities were also available.

Both the associated boathouses and docking facilities are not currently part of the revised plan. Staff notes in the text of the revised plan report, the boathouse locations are identified to be a future phase of the waterfront that would fall outside the current design boundary of the revised concept plan (at 34th Street, NW) but are still intended to be developed at some future date. However, any form of dock facilities at the east end of the park has been omitted in the revised concept. As noted above, staff concludes this is an omission that should be altered and that provision for limited temporary boat docking should be established in the plan as previously endorsed by the Commission. Additionally, it is emphasized that the intent is to provide

temporary daytime mooring of boats only, and that no construed implication is made that any food establishment or other activity is endorsed by this revision.

CONFORMANCE

National Historic Preservation Act

The Park Service has completed its Section 106 responsibilities for the revised concept plan, determining that the implementation of the concept would have no adverse effect on the historic or architectural character of the waterfront area.

The D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) determined that the 1986 concept plan for the Georgetown Waterfront Park would have no adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the Georgetown Historic District or the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The project was also reviewed by the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board at that time. The effect determination was reached with two conditions: that each request for demolition be considered individually, and that the location and design of future boathouses be reviewed. The level of archaeological assessment was commended, as was the “sensitive landscape design, which avoids archaeological resources.”

The current proposal does not extend nor significantly deviate from the area of that reviewed design. Most of the park can be installed without digging beneath the disturbed top layer; for tree plantings and some other features, archaeological monitoring will take place during construction to ensure that artifacts remain *in situ* and are not disturbed. The landscape design was developed to avoid disturbance.

NPS has conferred with the DC SHPO again about the current concept plan submission. The 1986 determination of no adverse effect is still considered valid, given the similarity of the plans, as well as the review protection for any demolitions and the archaeological monitoring. As the design to be implemented is developed beyond the concept stage, further consultation may be warranted.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation also commented on the concept plan in 1986, stating that the implementation of the plan would improve the appearance of the waterfront and enhance the public’s enjoyment of the river as a major recreation area.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service and the Commission arrived at a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) through the completion of an Environmental Assessment in June 1984.

Staff has reviewed the current revised design plans and finds them fully consistent with the analysis and conclusions found in the original evaluation. Staff has reviewed the action for extraordinary circumstances as sanctioned by NEPA and determined the FONSI remains valid in accordance with the Commission’s procedures.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

In the Commission's most recent FCIP report, fiscal years 2003-2008, the Commission recommended the project for future programming and it is anticipated that NPS will be providing a more detailed budget proposal in the next FCIP review cycle.

A portion of the GWP project is included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program (FCIP) fiscal years 2001 – 2005, adopted by the Commission on August 3, 2000. The costs associated with restoration of canal and seawall areas are estimated at approximately \$1.7 million. The need for funding of the overall GWP has been identified by the Commission since 1981.

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal for the GWP is consistent with policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element designate river and waterfront settings of the Nation's Capital. The Comprehensive Plan policies state:

Policies for Rivers and Waterways

- The entire Anacostia and Potomac Rivers system should be a constant source of enjoyment, urban orientation, and visual delight. Its major features should be retained and enhanced as great open space resources and as recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and water quality restored.
- Efforts should be continued to improve the quality of water in the Potomac and Anacostia.
- Rivers to allow for both restored natural habitats and increased recreational use and to help meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay 2000 agreement.
- As the water quality improves, swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, as well as water-oriented tourist activities should be encouraged, while protecting the integrity and health of the shoreline eco-system.

Policies for Shorelines and Waterfronts

- The shoreline of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in the National Capital Region should be preserved, restored, and enhanced as a matter of federal interest.
- In urban waterfront areas that are determined appropriate for development, the following guidelines should be applied:
 - a. Construction in environmentally sensitive areas should be avoided.
 - b. Degraded areas of shorelines should be restored, stabilized, and/or improved and landscaped.
 - c. Development along or near the shoreline should be limited and integrated with the generally low and continuous line of river embankments...In areas characterized as urban waterfronts, such as the Georgetown Waterfront, the Southwest Waterfront, and areas of Southeast near the Southeast Federal Center/Washington Navy Yard, there may be defined areas where building heights may be expected to be higher.

Shoreline areas where higher building heights could be focused include L'Enfant vistas such as South Capitol Street, New Jersey and Potomac Avenues, M Street, SE, K Street, NW, and others that may be appropriate.

d. Long, unbroken stretches of buildings or walls along the waterfronts should be avoided. Development along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers should be designed to allow residents and visitors maximum visual and physical access to the waterfront. This should also apply to all construction, including new roads and freeways, as well as concentrated governmental or institutional land uses that create barriers to waterfront access.

e. Development within 200 feet of the shoreline should include the use of Best Management Practices to limit the amount of impervious surface. Such practices could include green roofs, rain gardens, porous pavers and native plant landscaping.

- The shorelines and waterfronts of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers within the District of Columbia should be publicly owned, except at planned waterfront locations in Georgetown, portions of the Southwest Waterfront along the Washington Channel, and Buzzard Point where controlled private development could be permitted.
- Within the District of Columbia, the character of publicly-owned waterfront areas should reflect great variety, ranging from a more developed shoreline in Georgetown, the Southwest Waterfront, and the Southeast Federal Center and Washington Navy Yard areas, for example, to a more natural treatment along the shorelines of the Upper Anacostia...
- The location of waterfront development, especially within the District of Columbia, such as boat docks and houses, plazas, water taxis, piers, docking areas, or appropriate waterfront buildings, should be consistent with the waterfront objectives contained in *Extending the Legacy* and Commission-approved plans for waterfront improvements. Proposed waterfront development on public land should be coordinated with the Commission in accordance with applicable laws and requirements.
- All lands within 150 to 200 feet of the water's edge along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers should be managed in a manner that will encourage the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic and ecological values of the waterways.